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Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Note by the Secretariat

Addendum

Discussion paper contributed by the children and youth major group**

Summary

Children and youth of the world have been formally acknowledged as important stakeholders who need to be considered in the development of global forest policy. The present paper aims to integrate this group's unique perspective on the five thematic issues to be discussed at the fourth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests and to demonstrate our ability to make a meaningful contribution to the implementation of necessary changes.

With regard to the social and cultural aspects of forests, we share the concern that the erosion of local control of resources threatens the social fabric of forest-dependent communities, of which youth are an integral part. We are concerned that inadequate protection and recognition of traditional forest-related knowledge will interfere with this invaluable resource being transferred to future generations. We request that explicit links between research and education be improved to ensure that subsequent generations will inherit scientific forest knowledge and be able to learn from mistakes made in the past. Finally, we identify the needs specific to our group pertaining to the development and implementation of monitoring and reporting, as well as the development of criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management.

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** Prepared by the International Forestry Students' Association.

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We seek the empowerment and resources necessary to help contribute to making the changes that have been proposed in relation to the five thematic issues and to facilitate the transition from dialogue to action.

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I. Introduction

1. The present discussion paper has been prepared to inform the United Nations Forum on Forests about concerns that children and youth have expressed regarding the five thematic issues to be discussed at the fourth session of the Forum, in Geneva in May 2004. As recognized by Agenda 21 (chapter 25), it is imperative that youth participate in all relevant decision-making processes, since these will affect their lives today as well as in the future. Our constituency comprises nearly 30 per cent of the global population and holds a unique perspective that needs to be taken into account.

2. Each of the five elements addressed below is of significant concern and consequence to youth, and we welcome the opportunity to participate in the formulation of international policies and processes that seek to address them. In addition, we seek to inform the Forum on Forests about activities that youth have initiated and that may contribute to addressing these elements.

II. Background

3. Children and youth have been recognized as a major group by the multi-stakeholder dialogue of the United Nations Forum on Forests, represented by three designated focal points: the Global Youth Network, Initiatives Jeunes and the International Forestry Students' Association (IFSA). These groups have collaborated with an additional 20 youth organizations in Africa and Asia to ensure that youth have a strong voice within the Forum process, and through their extensive networks they have performed outreach work to encourage participation.

4. Such efforts have resulted in a number of important contributions in the realm of international forest policy. The IFSA International Frameworks in Forest Politics seminar, held in Freiburg, Germany, in June 2003, involved student representatives from 26 countries and increased awareness of the role that international processes play in domestic forest policy and practice. IFSA has initiated collaboration with the International Union of Forest Research Organizations, which will be supporting the next two International Forestry Students' Symposiums, to be held in Toronto in August 2004 and Australia in 2005. Several countries have involved youth groups in the development of their National Forest Programmes. Most recently, youth figured prominently in the twelfth World Forestry Congress, held in Quebec City in September 2003, which included a day-long youth side event.

5. These efforts contribute to the recognition of youth as an important stakeholder in forest management. The management of forests is a long-term endeavour and a responsibility that is passed from one generation to the next. If the youth of today are to be prepared for this undertaking, they require education and capacity-building in the near future. Youth will inherit the consequences linked to action or inaction regarding the current and historical mismanagement of forest resources. They can play a crucial role in implementing policies designed to ensure the integrity of the world's forest ecosystems.

III. Thematic issues

Thematic issue 1: social and cultural aspects of forests

Sharing of forest benefits and community-based forest management

6. One of the principal concerns of forest-dependent communities today is the loss of control over the management of their forest resources. Timber cut in developing regions or in countries with large intact primary forests is often shipped away to be processed, with very little employment generated for local communities Furthermore, there is an emerging push to link local forest management with poverty alleviation efforts in developing countries.

7. IFSA, representing forestry students from all over the world, chose the theme "Forests for food and water" for its last symposium, held in Turkey in September 2003, referring to the relationship of inseparability between people and the forests they depend upon, over and above the mere extraction of forest products carried out by forestry operations. The global youth community has initiated and carried out several programmes in various communities from developing countries (especially in Africa and Latin America) with the aim of engaging local people in the management of their own resources. For example, IFSA is an active participant in the Village Concept Project, which encompasses not only forestry management in these local communities, but also formal education for children, medical care, social programmes and a range of other services.

The role of women and youth in forest management

8. Women and youth are often underrepresented in the decision-making processes that govern the management of the world's forests. This imbalance needs to be corrected, and commitments to improving the inclusiveness of forest management policies and operations need to be made.

Recommendations

(a) Commit to strengthening and diversifying local economies, enabling community-based forest management to produce a range of timber and non-timber products in a sustainable manner;

(b) Acknowledge that communities that are directly dependent on the services provided by the forest have the greatest stake in ensuring their maintenance, and that the long-term health of the forest is best assured by granting such communities the power to manage their own resources;

(c) Encourage a much wider range of tenure types, including those for non-timber resources, with priority for new tenures given to communities and indigenous groups that have developed ecosystem-based management plans;

(d) Demonstrate tangible progress towards meeting Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action 56 (m) and 56 (n), creating equal opportunities for women to benefit from forest-related education and technology.

Thematic issue 2: traditional forest-related knowledge

9. The transfer of traditional forest-related knowledge from elders to youth is an important way to ensure that the intellectual heritage of forest-dependent communities is maintained. However, we observe two disturbing trends. First, there is a continuing loss of traditional forest-related knowledge due to inadequate recognition and protection, and thus there is continuing forest degradation and deforestation. Second, there is an alarming trend of intellectual appropriation by commercial entities without due and equitable compensation to the local knowledge holders. This trend, commonly termed "bio-piracy", threatens to rob the youth of today, and future generations, of the rights to this knowledge.

Advancing the use of traditional forest-related knowledge

10. The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action provide broad recommendations for countries to advance the use of traditional forest-related knowledge for sustainable forest management, with the participation of indigenous and local people. Decision makers must ensure that co-management and other forms of participatory forest management provide the means for incorporating relevant traditional forest-related knowledge into forest management plans and practices, with the involvement of the local communities. Research and extension on in situ and ex situ traditional forest management approaches, or those that integrate scientific forestry and traditional forest-related knowledge, must be promoted.

Intellectual property rights and traditional forest-related knowledge

11. The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action require nations and relevant international organizations to promote the development of intellectual property rights for traditional forest-related knowledge and to promote equitable benefit-sharing. International instruments have played a key role in increasing access to traditional forest-related knowledge through trade and knowledge exchange while setting some standards for countries to follow in protecting intellectual property rights. However, certain deficiencies in the current instruments render them incapable of protecting traditional forest-related knowledge against intellectual appropriation, such as a reliance on the Western concepts of private property and of scientific knowledge, and an inability to accept non-standardized documentation. Evidence suggests that the current intellectual property rights regime inequitably benefits wealthy nations, with at least 97 per cent of all patents held by nationals of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries and at least 90 per cent of all technology and product patents held by multinational corporations.

12. Such intellectual appropriation increases the vulnerability of forest-dependent communities, their traditional forest-related knowledge, and the forest ecosystems, because of potential environmental degradation and extinctions or extirpations of species due to overharvesting by bio-prospectors. Unless drastic measures are taken today, the current trends will subject present and future generations to greater vulnerability as a consequence of losing the heritage of forest knowledge and resources.

13. There is a need for radical scrutiny of current intellectual property right regimes globally and nationally to ensure that they provide adequate opportunities to develop alternative property rights arrangements that are ethically, socially and environmentally appropriate to users and owners of traditional forest-related knowledge, and that acknowledge customary laws and practices. Such institutional arrangements are prerequisites for ensuring prior informed consent and equity to the knowledge holders, under mutually agreed terms, in all cases involving exchange of traditional forest-related knowledge between knowledge holders and other parties. This will ensure that indigenous and local communities maintain control over their knowledge, innovations and practices, and the subsequent transfer of such knowledge to younger generations.

Recommendations

(a) Enact legislative and land tenure reforms required to remove barriers to traditional forest-related knowledge being adopted in forest management;

(b) Develop an institutional framework that will enable the practical application of traditional forest-related knowledge systems, moving beyond research and pilot case studies;

(c) Integrate relevant sources of traditional forest-related knowledge into forestry curricula and educational programmes so that youth and children may have access to such knowledge;

(d) Establish national, regional, and global databases and reporting systems to share information on developments made in inventorying, cataloguing and applying traditional forest-related knowledge, with the aim of protecting the rights to this knowledge for future generations.

Thematic issue 3: scientific forest-related knowledge

14. Our current knowledge regarding the status of the world's forests and our dependence on their ecological functions has benefited from scientific research performed around the world. While simultaneously embracing the benefits that science can bring to forest management, we need to acknowledge that many of the key decisions to be made are not of a technical or scientific nature. Many decisions, such as deciding what is an acceptable level of risk or whether to accommodate sensitive species, are inevitably value-based, and should be acknowledged as such.

The precautionary principle

15. Scientific knowledge should be drawn upon to identify the risks associated with forestry and to ensure that operations err on the side of caution when these risks are identified. This precautionary principle needs to be embraced by all governments participating in the United Nations Forum on Forests to ensure the practical application of science in forest management. Important elements of the precautionary principle include:

(a) Avoiding actions that may lead to irreversible changes to ecosystem function and resilience;

(b) Considering alternative management strategies, identifying those least likely to impair the viability of a species or an ecosystem;

(c) Placing the onus on forest managers to demonstrate that proposed management activities are not likely to impair ecosystem function and resilience;

(d) Remaining mindful of the needs of future generations.

Ecosystem-based management

16. Scientific forest-related knowledge is instrumental in conducting ecosystem-based management, which encapsulates the spirit of the precautionary principle. According to ecosystem-based management, forest management focuses on what to leave behind after harvesting operations are completed, instead of the conventional model that focuses on what to extract. This requires the abandonment of short-rotation industrial forestry and the adoption of practices based on natural forest cycles. Through ecosystem-based management, managers can make a conscientious choice to ensure that the ecosystem health of natural forests is maintained, basing forest activities on what the ecosystem can sustain in the long run instead of on the demands of industry.

Scientific research and education

17. Explicit links between research and education must be made to ensure that subsequent generations will inherit scientific forest knowledge and be able to learn from mistakes made in the past. Youth have a key role to play, contributing a fresh perspective while simultaneously gaining experience.

18. Currently, developed countries have the highest level of forestry-related research and have become an important source of scientific information related to forests, as well as technological innovation used all over the world. Students from developed regions have the opportunity to participate in scientific projects in a variety of ways, such as through coursework, internships or research-based graduate studies. Access to education is often limited in developing countries, where many young people are not even able to attain a basic education. Yet even in wealthy countries, education concerning forest conservation is not always included in standard school curricula. This needs to be addressed, starting at the primary level, if students are to be aware of the value and benefits of forests.

19. Funding is a major barrier to forest-related research and education in many countries. The Intergovernmental Forum on Forests has encouraged national governments to increase funding research, especially in developing countries. We request that this proposal require that a certain percentage of the funding be targeted at youth, to allow this segment of society to be a part of forest research projects.

Capacity-building and knowledge transfer

20. Scientific research, and the resultant knowledge that is accumulated, must not be constrained by national boundaries; cooperation should facilitate knowledge exchange. Students can play a role here as part of research teams, facilitating cooperation with local people while acquiring technical expertise. IFSA has embraced this spirit of cooperation through its exchange programme, which provides forest-related work experience for students from various countries through engagement with a scientific project. It has been enormously successful, not only

due to the efforts of IFSA, but also because of the companies and institutions that participate. The programme is expected to grow as more and more entities express interest in collaborating.

21. The future implementation of sustainable forest management requires professionals with knowledge about the International Forest Policy Dialogue. As education on this issue at the university level is rare, IFSA established partnerships with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and other partners to provide students with information about the ongoing processes and to arouse their interest in international forest politics.

Recommendations

(a) Demonstrate consideration for future generations by exercising the precautionary principle when faced with scientific uncertainty in forest management decision-making;

(b) Incorporate forest conservation and sustainable forest use into educational curricula, starting at the primary-school level;

(c) Dedicate a portion of forest research funding specifically to youth-based projects.

Thematic issue 4: monitoring, assessment and reporting

22. Monitoring, assessment and reporting is an integral component in developing good National Forest Programmes for sustainable forest management, from high-level strategic planning to site-level operations, and provides a mechanism for assessing the current status of application of agreed requirements and proposals.

23. However, there have been many problems associated with field application, and many countries either have inadequate monitoring, assessment and reporting or are not submitting country reports to the United Nations Forum on Forests. Obstacles include confusion regarding whose responsibility it is to coordinate monitoring, assessment and reporting analysis and by whom the data should be collected, a lack of capacity in developing countries to undertake monitoring, assessment and reporting activities adequately and the contentiousness of final reports due to allegations of bias or inadequate data collection. Furthermore, there is a lack of agreement regarding methods of assessing some forest services, such as carbon sequestration and biodiversity, as well as other less tangible elements, such as spiritual and cultural benefits.

Recommendations

(a) Improve national monitoring and reporting, encompassing the full range of scientific, environmental, economic and social aspects of forests and forest management, and include site-specific testing to ensure its compatibility with real field data;

(b) Support developing nations in building their capacity to undertake monitoring, assessment and reporting activities.

Thematic issue 5: criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management

Implementation at the national, subnational and operations level

24. To ensure the successful implementation of sustainable forest management, appropriate criteria and indicators need to be developed and tested. The next generation responsible for the management of the world's forests needs to be informed about the role that criteria and indicators can play, and should also be given an opportunity to participate in their development. Countries can demonstrate their commitment by developing an appropriate forum in which youth can share their ideas regarding sustainable forest management.

25. It should be recognized that truly unbiased reporting on success in meeting criteria and indicators can be assured only through third-party auditing and reporting. At the very least, country reports should be subject to review by an external board. Countries should be requested to identify existing laws and regulations that pose barriers to sustainability and to demonstrate changes that are made to remove them.

Technical and financial resources

26. The development, field testing and implementation of criteria and indicators is currently hindered in developing countries due to the inadequacy of resources. Technical aid, such as facilitating access to the Internet or other communication media, should be provided so that children and youth can inform themselves regarding current issues and actions. While only a small part of the solution, use of the Internet may enable young people to gather information and share ideas. However, this form of communication is currently not available for the majority of the world's youth, the bulk of whom live in developing countries, struggling to meet the most immediate and basic needs.

Recommendations

(a) Acknowledge youth and children as important stakeholders in the development and implementation of criteria and indicators. The ability of this significant portion of the world's population to understand such complex issues should not be underestimated;

(b) Provide the technical assistance and funding needed to support criteria and indicators development and implementation. The participation of children and youth depends on such help, as the sector of society with the least access to funds.

IV. Conclusion

27. **The full participation of all interested parties is to be encouraged in the formulation and implementation of forest policy, with no segment of society excluded. Youth and children have a high degree of independence and ability to organize themselves, and this organizational capacity should be supported and drawn upon by national, regional and international governing institutions and non-governmental organizations. Increasingly, regional and internationally**

relevant institutions are allowing youth to be a part of forest policy debates, as Agenda 21 did in acknowledging youth as a major group.

28. **Traditional forest-related knowledge has been identified as critical to the sustainable use of forest resources. The vulnerability of local knowledge holders to intellectual appropriation has increased, due to the inadequacy of institutional and legal protection. Youth and children may suffer the greatest consequences of this, due to loss of knowledge heritage and forest resources. An equitable application of traditional forest-related knowledge will occur only when there are favourable land tenure and property rights, including mutually agreed intellectual property rights and contractual mechanisms. Research on traditional forest-related knowledge must be linked to education and policy development and aimed to suit the needs and reflect the comparative advantages of local communities that are the holders and users of this knowledge, as well as to facilitate transfers of knowledge from older to younger generations.**

29. **Scientific knowledge should be drawn upon in the formulation of forest policy, in identifying the risks associated with logging activities and in ensuring that operations err on the side of caution when these risks are identified. Youth and children have much to contribute to the execution and evolution of scientific forest research, and their participation should be enabled through improved forest-related educational opportunities.**

30. **It is imperative to the viability of international bodies such as the United Nations Forum on Forests that a link be made between their outcomes and on-the-ground management. Monitoring and reporting can provide a vehicle to facilitate this process. It is also essential that existing efforts made by international forest policy institutions to create a clear set of terms and definitions for criteria and indicators be expanded and accepted by all nations by the end of the fourth session of the Forum on Forests.**

31. **We sincerely hope that this extensive United Nations Forum on Forests process will result in a successful transition from dialogue to the implementation of a tangible action plan. Youth from around the world are ready to accept the challenge of helping to make this happen. Although this group has demonstrated the ability to implement forest-related research and education projects, there exists a much greater capacity to contribute. We look forward to hearing how our input has been given consideration in this process, and to being called upon to help make progressive change a reality.**